



TYOLOGIES OF OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN IN ALBANIA

December 2021

This report on Typologies of Out of School Children in Albania was prepared by the “Observatory for Children and Youth Rights” thanks to the financing and support of the UNICEF Albania, in implementation of the initiative “Out of School Children”. The opinions and views expressed in this report are of the authors’ team and do not necessarily reflect those of the UNICEF.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

5DE	Five Dimensions of Exclusion
ANOVA	Analysis of variance
CMD	Council of Minister Decision
CMF	Conceptual and Methodological Framework
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EMIS	Educational Management Information System
GoA	Government of Albania
INSTAT	National Institute of Statistics
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
MES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MoSWY	Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
Observatory	Observatory for Children and Youth Rights
OOSC	Out-of-school children
OOSCI	Out-of-School Children Initiative
RED	Regional Education Directorate
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Every child in school” is an initiative implemented by the Observatory for Children and Youth Rights (Observatory) in partnership with United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Ministry of Education and Sports (MES). In 2019, according to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Institute for Statistics (UIS), 7000 school-age children are reported to be out of the 9-year compulsory school system¹ highlighting the persistent need for intervention and improvement in the support system for children who have abandoned school or are at risk of dropping out.

The global initiative on *Out of School Children* (OOSC) represents a partnership that seeks to significantly reduce the number of children who remain out of school with the goal of achieving universal primary education for all children. The Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) supports countries in developing databases and policies to identify children who remain outside the education system and also provides tools for analysing the situation and developing pro OOSC policies².

The UIS³ estimates that there are 59 million primary school age children and 65 million lower secondary school age children in the world out of school in 2019. According to a recent joint UIS-Global Monitoring report factsheet there has been stagnation in achieving the goals of OOSCI and the number of children who remain out of school or drop has increased as a result of lack of aid and financial resources to deal with the situation. Global and regional data on trends with out-of-school children show that whilst the situation has improved over the past decade there is a strong need for a more systematic approach to address the problem of out-of-school children and guide concrete education sector reforms in this regard.

Designed to reach a better understanding of existing data, the initiative is particularly important for researching the situation of the most disadvantaged OOSC. Developing typologies of children out of school has proven to be a challenge in many countries of the world and the effort has been limited to only some characteristics making difficult the task of identifying and addressing the multiple and overlapping forms of exclusion and disparities that affect them. This multi-dimensionality of disparities has proven to make it extremely difficult to formulate and adequately support multi-sectoral policies for countries trying to address the issue. Hence in Albania the approach chosen started with the piloting of the OOSC in the region of Durrës to prepare an effective nation-wide model of policy intervention with measures applicable in different situations of OOSC.

The effort of achieving universal education represents a primary concern for the government as well as UNICEF in Albania, the leading United Nations (UN) Agency in this initiative. As a result of the cooperation (partnership) two major legal and binding documents have been issued. The first, a Cooperation Agreement⁴ among four government ministries that aims to regulate the processes related to school registration. The second, a trilateral joint regulation

¹ OSC (2019) “Case study on cross- sectoral cooperation to identify and reintegrate Out of School children- Albania”

² Global Out-of-School Children Initiative Operation Manual, April 2015, page 7.

³ For more information see the link to the UIS report: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/fs-31-out-of-school-children-en.pdf>

⁴ This Cooperation Agreement of August 2nd, 2013, “On the Identification and Registration to School of all Children of Mandatory Education Age” was signed by four ministries of the Albanian Government respectively: Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Please note that ministries have changed since then.

(order) is a structural document that outlines the duties of each ministry and inter-operational responsibilities of the MES in the process of implementing the cooperation agreement⁵. These two documents provide the policy framework upon which the activities related to reduction of OOSC are taking place.

The goals for the project in Albania include change and positive results in all the 5 dimensions of the initiative starting with the registration to school of all the children who reach school age and ending with high school students who are risking drop out. The target in Albania for achieving universal school age registration and integration of OOSC in the national system has been set for the year 2027. In achieving the goal of universal school registration in Albania inter-governmental cooperation was considered of primary importance side by side with a functional electronic information system.

In terms of the project the goals can be grouped in:

- those related to the development of capacities at the regional educational directorate and school level to identify and deal with OOSC
- those related to the development of capacities in institutions involved in the OOSC initiative through the intergovernmental policies
- those related to the establishment of cooperation between school and educational actors in one side and local government, local police force, local health units in the other side ensuring identification and registration of OOSC in school.

Observatory, an active civil society organization with presence in local level, covering all the country, is supporting the MES in the pilot phase of the OOSCI in Albania. It is an implementing partner in this initiative and is managing it as a pilot project⁶. This organization offers support in the process of defending the rights of the children in all the aspects including the juvenile justice system, support for Roma children, and under marriage age mothers and their children. They also lobby with government institutions at the local levels for the rights of the children.

According to the updated pre-university education law (69/2012) the educational system (*sistemi parauniversitar*) is structured as 5+4+3. It is organized in the following cycles: early school level (*cerdhe*), kindergarten (*kopesht*) – composed of three level grades (*niveli pare*, *niveli dyte* and *grupi i trete (I madh)*); primary school (*shkolla 9 vjecare filllore*) comprises nine grades: the preparatory grade is added recently (*parashkollori*) and grades I to IV (*shkolla filllore*) and grades V – IX (*shkolla 9 vjecare*); and secondary (*shkolla e mesme e pergjithshme dhe shkolla e mesme profesionale*) – three or four grades (grades X to XII/XIII) with a theoretical, vocational or technological track (the last one offering students professional qualifications and managed in Albania from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth - MoSWY). The majority of children with special educational needs are integrated in mainstream schools. However, those with severe handicaps attend special schools, mainly students with more severe handicap.

⁵. The Joint Order of January 5, 2015 related to the implementation of the cooperation agreement related to the identification and registration to school of children of mandatory education age is signed by the Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Health. Please note that Albania, following parliamentary elections, has a new government structure since mid-2013.

⁶. As a result of this the terms “project” will be used to address the work done by the Observatory and the term “initiative” will be used to address government action

The education levels that are most important for the OOSCI study are International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 0, ISCED 1 and ISCED 2, covering the pre-primary, primary levels corresponding to grades 0 to IX.

Higher education (*arsimi i larte universitar*) is organized according to the principles of the Bologna process, which at its core has the construction of the European higher education area. It has the following components, corresponding to ISCED 5 and 6: Bachelor (*bachelor*) 3 years in most disciplines; Master (*master professional dhe shkencor*) 2 years in most disciplines; doctorate (*doktoratura*) at least 3 years.

As already indicated, according to new regulations, compulsory school includes the primary level (preparatory year and grades I to IV) and lower secondary (grades V to IX). Private pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education is available mostly in urban areas and covers only a small minority of children.

According to information from the MES and studies produced in Albania the reasons why children leave school before the end of the 9th grade in Albania are numerous, such as:

- precarious economic situation
- health problems and disability
- low level of education of parents
- distance of schools from housing
- parental emigration
- demographic movements of the population
- mentality; blood feuds; social problems
- exploitation of children for work inside and outside the family
- irresponsibility of teachers and school leaders
- poor engagement with parents to convince them to enroll children in school
- non-enforcement of legal and sub-legal acts against school dropout
- non-attendance of kindergarten by preschoolers
- family, economic, and social circumstances of Roma and Egyptian parents
- in some extreme cases, school dropout results from abused, trafficked, or exploited children⁷

Reports indicate that OOSC in Albania include children of Roma and Egyptian ethnic minorities; young children contributing to family income and children with disabilities.

Factors that increase dropout are individual and related to family and school. They can also be contextual. Family factors include poverty, family conflict, parental education, parental attitudes toward education, and parental involvement in their child's education (*Malcolm et al. 2003; Romero and Lee 2008*). School factors include curriculum, poor teaching, negative school environment, interpersonal conflict or poor relationship with teachers, dissatisfaction with school, school disciplinary practices, and threats to physical security such as bullying and bullying (*Corville-Smith et al. 1998; Malcolm et al. 2003*). Notable community factors include delinquent peer relationships (*Henry and Huizinga 2007*), employment and other community opportunities, neighborhood characteristics and level of organization, levels of social support, community norms, and community violence. (*Bowen et al. 2002; Lyon and Cotler 2007; MacDonald and Marsh 2007*).

⁷ Observatori për të Drejtat e Fëmijëve dhe të Rinjve (2019) Udhëzues trajnimi për institucionet arsimore në nivel vendor, në kuadër të zbatimit të nismës “Çdo fëmijë në shkollë”.

Studies show that school dropout has a negative impact not only on children and their families but also on schools and communities. According to Baker school dropouts has a negative impact and results in a less educated workforce, increased criminal activity and loss of businesses because of youth related shoplifting enforcing governments to spend more for social services (*Baker et al. 2001*).

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK SUPPORTING OOSC CHILDREN AND RISKING SCHOOL DROPOUT

The right to education is guaranteed by the constitution in the Republic of Albania. All citizens of the Republic of Albania and foreign citizens residing in Albania, at the proper age defined by law, are provided with the opportunity to attend educational institutions without any kind of discrimination due to gender, race, color, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, political beliefs, or religious status, economic or social status, kinship, age, place of residence, disability, health status, any other citizen status, or for other reasons defined in Albanian legislation.

The Law “On the pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania” (no. 69 dated 21.06.2012 and updated in 2021) in its general principles stipulates that “The principle of inclusion of students is applied in all educational institutions and every student is provided with the right to quality education, as well as equal opportunities for education.” Article 63 of the same law pays special attention to the inclusion in public education of all children with disabilities. Article 68 of the law stipulates that: “*non-registration and unreasonable absences of the child in school for more than 25 percent of classes during a school year are considered as a case of parental negligence and are treated in accordance with law 18/2017 “On child rights and protection”*”. Article 24 of this law states that “In case a child, within the age for which compulsory education is provided, avoids education, in order to carry out activities prohibited, the educational staff, under legal obligation, immediately notifies the parent or guardian, as well as the child protection unit, who take immediate measures to get the child back to school.” The same law defines a series of obligations of the MES and its subordinate institutions, among others to enable the child access to preschool education, as well as compulsory education for all children, even in cases where children may have passed the age for compulsory education but have been unable to attend it.

MES Instruction no. 17, dated 09.05.2018 "On the procedures for compulsory education attendance by students who have not attended at least two levels (grades) of basic education and for part-time education in elementary education", facilitates the procedures of enrollment / return to school of children who, for the circumstances set out in the instruction, have not attended elementary education for at least two school years, have dropped out of school, are identified as not enrolled in school or are children in a street situation. Children and youth of Roma and Egyptian background are benefiting from this instruction.

Council of Minister Decision (CMD) 666 of 10/10/2019 “On the financial food quotas in canteens and dormitories and defining of the scholarship and financial support criteria for students of pre-university education in public educational institutions” helps to provide scholarships, financial support for children who are enrolled in basic education, who due to financial distress cannot attend elementary education and are at risk of dropping out.

In Albania, as a result of an effective cooperation between UNICEF and Government of Albania (GoA) facilitated by the Observatory, the institutional framework that deals with, monitors, and organizes the process of identification and registration of children reaching

compulsory school age is well established. It also works to minimize school dropout by children because of identification mechanisms established. This institutional framework is based on the Cooperation Agreement between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities issued in 2013; and updated in 2018. The Observatory regularly updates the "Guide for monitoring children outside the education system and children at risk of dropping out of school" initially approved by the MES on 10/9/2013.

III. DEFINITIONS OF OOSC CONTEXTUALIZED IN THE SCHOOL SETTING OF ALBANIA

In an education system that supports its statistics and data gathering in a functioning Educational Management Information System (EMIS) the warning mechanisms are generally built-in. In the situation that Albania is, with no functioning EMIS system in place we had to develop both definitions and mechanisms to deal with OOSC while implementing it in the selected schools of Durrës region. The definition of an out-of-school-child we used for the statistical data and in developing the baseline is the following: *a child who is of school age but is not enrolled in any educational program*. The drop-out is defined in this context as *the case when a student enrolled at the beginning of a school year stops attending the classes and fails to finalize that year*. Drop-out rate indicator is calculated therefore as the ratio between the school population enrolled at the beginning of the school year and the number of students enrolled at the end of the year.

However, the schools are reporting data also based on the “administrative” definition of drop-out, stating that a student is officially considered as drop-out only when he/she is more than two years older than the official age corresponding to a specific grade. These two definitions are also in contradiction with each other when we face the situation of a student who migrates with his/her family illegally. The challenge of definition in this case is related to the status of the student while he/she is outside the country and to their status once they return in the country.

3.1 The OOSC Baseline

Another data source, in relation with the establishment of the baseline in the pilot area was a very detailed questionnaire related to the situation with OOSC including drop out and the way and policies that manage this process in the Albanian setting. In order to better understand the existing data, specific individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders involved in policies relevant of OOSC, both from national, regional and school level. There were 11 major categories of stakeholders involved in the process that included:

- a. School principals
- b. Teachers
- c. Students
- d. Parents
- e. Parents of disabled students
- f. Home class teachers
- g. Health workers
- h. Police representatives
- i. Local government representatives including Civil Registry staff
- j. Education inspectors
- k. School psychologists and social workers
- l. Community leaders

3.2 Five Dimensions of Exclusion

5 DE

- Dimension 1:** Children of pre-primary school age who are not in pre-primary or primary school
- Dimension 2:** Children of primary school age who are not in primary or secondary school
- Dimension 3:** Children of lower secondary school age who are not in primary or secondary school
- Dimension 4:** Children who are in primary school but at risk of dropping out
- Dimension 5:** Children who are in lower secondary school but at risk of dropping out

Figure 1: Five dimensions of exclusion in education

The input was used to feed information regarding statistical data to be collected via EMIS but also to create opportunities to measure progress in identifying and dealing with OOSC cases. In the development of data collection parameters, we took into consideration the main dimensions of exclusion as outlined in the Conceptual and Methodological Framework (CMF) of the OOSC initiative. According to the CMF, there are **five main dimensions of exclusion** (5DE) including two dimensions that capture the out-of-school population of primary school age (Dimension 2) and lower secondary school age (Dimension 3). Pre-primary education is represented by Dimension 1, which highlights children of pre-primary school age who are not in pre-primary or

primary education. The approach includes also Dimensions 4 and 5 that focus on children who are in school but are at risk of dropping out. The assumption of the global initiative and of the Albania report is that understanding more about these groups of children is key for reintegration in the education and training system and/or for preventing them from becoming the out-of-school children of tomorrow. Combining the *out-of-school* and *at-risk* dimensions, it is possible to set out specific groups of children who are not participating in the intended level of education for the intended duration and at the intended age. The 5DE listed below are displayed in Figure 1.

The 5DE

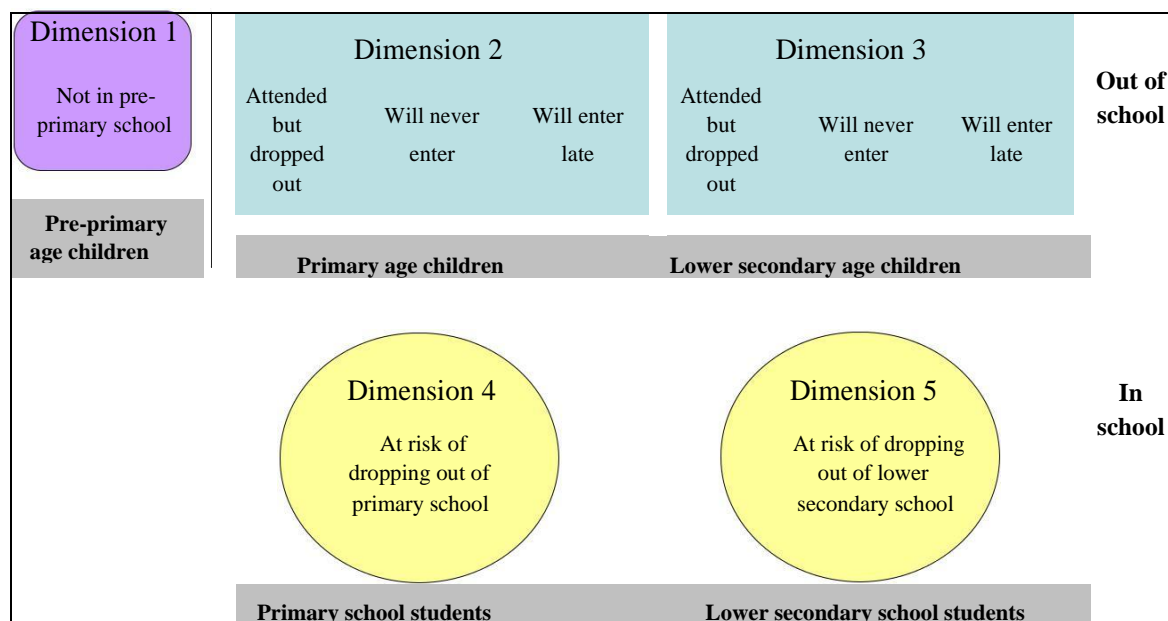


Figure 2: The 5 DE according to UNICEF/UNESCO

Dimension 1 represents a group of children who do not benefit from pre-primary education and who may therefore not be adequately prepared for primary education, placing them at risk of not entering into primary education or, if they do enter, at risk of dropping out. Although pre-primary education programmes may be longer than one year, the 5DE propose a standard approach for all countries by focusing on pre-primary participation of children in the year preceding the official entrance age into primary school, something that in Albania is already implemented including the intervention with preparatory classes of pre-schools within school buildings.

Each of the out-of-school **Dimensions 2 and 3** is divided into three mutually exclusive categories based on previous or future school exposure: children who attended in the past and dropped out, children who will never enter school, and children who will enter school in the future. This typology of children out of school is adopted from the 2005 report by UIS and UNICEF. OOSC of primary or lower secondary age who completed primary education are distinguished from children who did not complete the full primary cycle before leaving school. These groups of children are identified separately within the out-of-school Dimensions 2 and 3.

Children in **Dimensions 4 and 5** – those in school but at risk of exclusion from education – are grouped by the level of education they attend, regardless of their age: primary (Dimension 4) or lower secondary (Dimension 5). This is different from Dimensions 2 and 3, which group out-of-school children by their age: primary age (Dimension 2) and lower secondary age (Dimension 3). The framework thus covers two different types of populations: the population of out-of-school children of school-going age, and the population of at-risk pupils of any age in primary or lower secondary school.

In general, the OOSC literature considers 8 aspects or areas that could have an immediate and positive impact on reducing OOSC in one particular country.

1. Early childhood care and development for improved school readiness with components like: (1) integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD) for narrowing developmental gaps and (2) quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) for improved cognitive and social/emotional development.
2. Enrolment Campaigns have shown to be effective in targeting girls and disadvantaged groups, refugee population, children with disabilities, those affected by conflict and living in extreme poverty.
3. Pro-poor Incentives including voucher-based programs, cash transfer programs (conditional and unconditional) and pro-poor economic incentives.
4. Alternative Learning Programs / Non-Formal Education Solutions that include bridging or accelerated learning programs; multi-grade schooling in situations of insufficient teaching staff, vocational skills and training, community led programs and private school outreach.
5. Effective Governance aspect of the OOSC brings to attention issues about decentralization of educational system and ways to make education more inclusive.
6. Sector Plans represent approaches that attempt unification across sectors to achieve a singular policy objective – in other terms – results in this area are achieved on the close work that bring together international donors in one hand and government entities in the other.
7. Effective Data Management is about accuracy and validity of data collection in terms of counting OOSC. Many countries have put into use the Education Management Information System (EMIS) as a way to better coordinate the data

streams and understand them in order to guide planning and policy making processes.

Definitions about out-of-school children are categorical in nature delineating between those who have never been to school despite having the appropriate age to enrol and those who dropped out of school for various reasons. According to data collected, OOSC children represent 9% of all primary school age children at the global level. In Albania this number is between 7 to 8 percent of the total primary school population.

IV. OOSC DATA AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

School dropout remains a significant problem in Albania. According to MES reports 16,697 students of compulsory education age in the country quitted school during the period 2010-2019. The phenomenon of school dropout is similarly spread in both rural and urban areas and with insignificant differences between the sexes. According to National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) data, the participation rate of children in compulsory education during 2019 was 93.9%, while in 2018 this indicator was 95.6%.

Table 1: Yearly school dropout rate

School Year	Dropout in absolute terms	Dropout in %
2011 - 12	1474	0.37
2012 - 13	1533	0.39
2013 - 14	2199	0.58
2014 - 15	2071	0.57
2015 - 16	1767	0.55
2016 - 17	1881	0.57
2017 - 18	1540	0.48

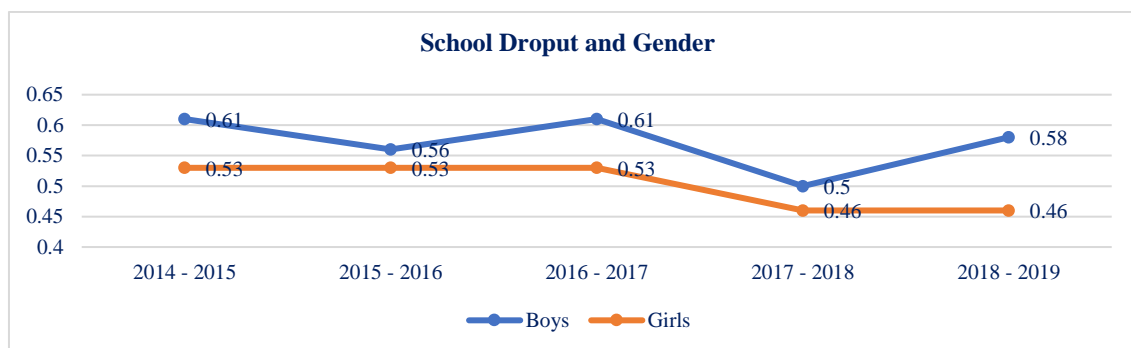


Figure 3: School dropout by gender and school year

Various research studies and reports that analyze the causes and *Typology of children at risk of dropping out of school* indicate the following categories as the ones with the highest risk of dropout:

- a. children with disabilities
- b. children returning from emigration
- c. children with various social problems

- d. children from Roma and Egyptian communities
- e. children working to help their families
- f. child victims of violence and trafficking
- g. survivors of sexual abuse
- h. abandoned children, etc.

According to MES data, *the municipalities with the highest number of dropouts in the school year 2017 - 2018 were: Korça 2.33%, Dibra 1.33% and Kruja 1.21%, while Vlora, Përmet, Has, Kolonja, and Peqin had a zero-dropout rate. A pilot study of the Observatory conducted in Shkodra, Tirana, and Berat indicated that school dropout is higher in poorer counties, among Roma and Egyptian children and in areas with poor access due to difficult terrain and infrastructure*⁸.

A monitoring report by the Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination reported that disabled children of school age not attending school were found in the Fier, Lezha and Durrës Regional Education Directories (REDs)⁹. In the RDPE of Durrës, according to the same report, there were 318 Romani children and 211 Egyptian children that did not attend compulsory pre-university education during 2018 - 2019 academic year. In the following academic year there were 211 Romani children and 225 Egyptian who did not attend. The REDs of Fier, Korça, and Lezha did not report of any unregistered children of Romani or Egyptian ethnicity.

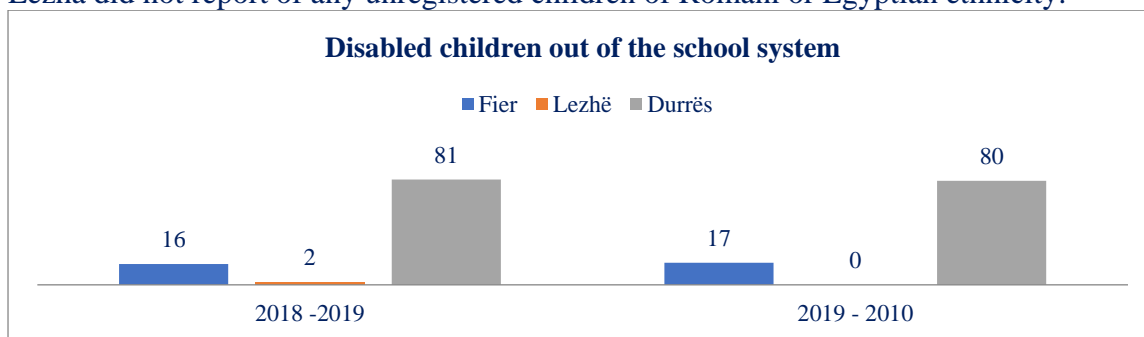


Figure 4: Disabled OOSC in Fier, Lezha and Durrës in 2018 - 2020 school years

Gender disaggregated OOSC data in the municipalities of Shkodra and Korça indicate that the number of boys leaving school is higher in Shkodra while in Korça this number is higher for girls as it is shown in the figures below.

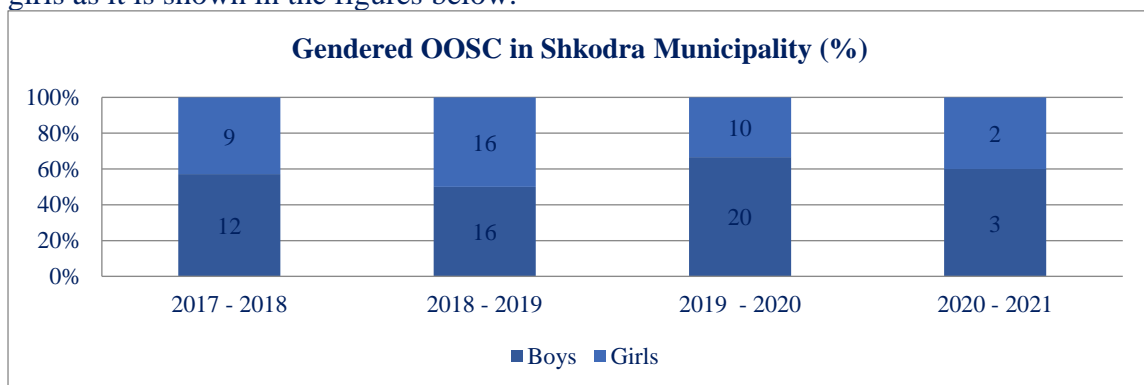


Figure 5: OOSC gendered data of Shkodra Municipality 2017 – 2021

⁸ Observatori për të Drejtat e Fëmijëve (2015). Udhëzues trajnimi për institucionet arsimore në nivel vendor, në kuadër të zbatimit të nismës “Çdo fëmijë në shkollë”, mbështetur nga MAS-i dhe UNICEF-i.

⁹ Komisioneri për mbrojtjen nga Diskriminimi (2020) “Raport monitorimi me fokus të veçantë fëmijët në arsim”

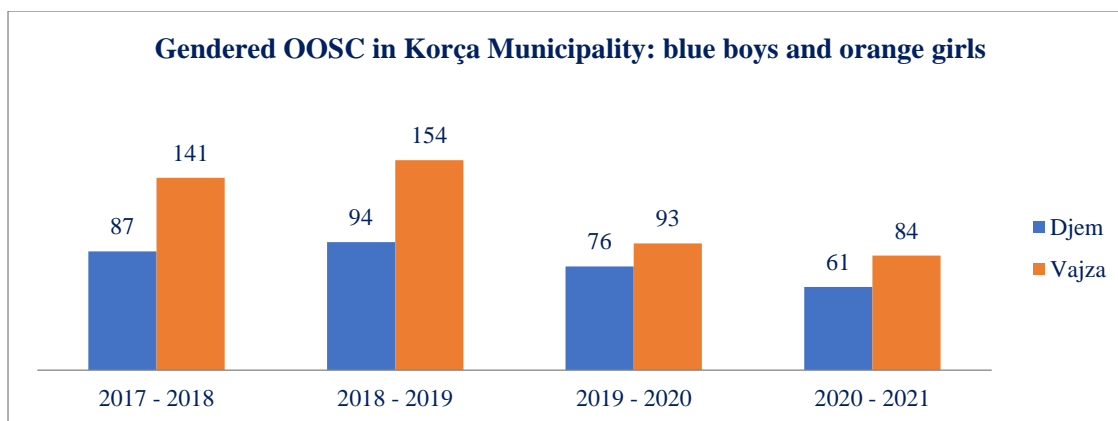


Figure 6: OOSC gendered data in numbers in Korça Municipality

Reported data are indicative of an OOSC decline in Albania. On the other hand, there are problems with municipal periodic reporting of OOSC and school dropout data including proper identification of children at risk of dropout.

V. HOW WERE THE TYPOLOGIES DESIGNED AND DEVELOPED?

In the process of developing an OOSC typologies for Albania the following were taken into consideration:

1. Desktop literature review of research articles and monitoring/ evaluation reports
2. Poll of OOSC and children who are at the risk of dropping out of school.
3. Round table discussion with policy makers, child specialists and education experts.

5.1 OOSC Poll

The poll was designed in two parts. *The first part of the questionnaire* was completed by the interviewer before the interview with the child that risked dropping out of school and information about child's status, his/her family situation and reasons for dropping out are gathered. Based on the data collected the interviewer placed the child in one of the following groups:

- Children who are not enrolled in school
- Children who are at risk of dropping out of school
- Children who have dropped out of school

The second part of the questionnaire was built on a series of interview questions to which children respond directly. According to the socio-ecologic model school dropout cannot be evaluated from an individual perspective only. Thus, the questionnaire contained several sections and factors¹⁰:

1. Individual factors:

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Class
- Child employment

¹⁰ The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention; Ajayi, K. V., Odonkor, G., Panjwani, S., Aremu, O., Garney, W., & Mckyer, L. (2021). Social-Ecological Barriers to Student-parents' Academic Success: A Systematic Review.; Trach, J., Lee, M., & Hymel, S. (2018). A social-ecological approach to addressing emotional and behavioral problems in schools: Focusing on group processes and social dynamics. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 26(1), 11-20.

- *Family composition*
 - *School performance*
 - *Mental and physical health*
- 2. Family factors**
- *Parent's education level*
 - *Parent's employment status*
 - *Parent's involvement in their children's education*
 - *Emigration and internal migration*
 - *Family size*
 - *Poverty*
 - *Care*
 - *Support*
 - *Positive family atmosphere*
 - *Security*
- 3. School related factors**
- *Teacher care*
 - *Teacher support*
 - *Peer support*
 - *School safety*
 - *Violent school environment and bullying*
 - *Conditions and physical infrastructure*
 - *Opportunity to attend school during a pandemic*
- 4. Contextual and community related factors**
- *Presence of violence in the community*
 - *Community safety*
 - *Community support*
 - *Community care*

Children participating in this poll might not have been familiar with polls and answering questions for themselves. The facilitation of the questionnaire by a trained professional who interviewed the child ensured information accuracy. The questionnaire considered the topics of safety, care, support, violence, and poverty in three social settings:

- a. family
- b. school
- c. community

5.2 Participants

The questionnaire was completed with the assistance of the field team of the Observatory. The team selected for the questionnaires was trained in advance to complete the questionnaire and to enter the data. A total of **141 interviews** were collected from *Tirana, Berat, Durrës, Dibra, and Korça*.

The method used for the selection of children was that of **stratified and intentional sampling**. The selection was intentional because the children selected were those who dropped out of school during the school year 2020-2021. The selection was stratified because the interviewers were oriented to maintain within their group of interviews the representation of different groups of children including those in poverty, Roma and Egyptian minorities and working children.

5.3 Data analysis and processing

The questionnaire included many open-ended questions to get concrete and specific opinions of children.

Data are **discarded and processed in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)**. A **special training** was organized with the data entry team to complete the database without errors and omissions. The analysis is descriptive in nature. **The Têo step Cluster technique** was used to create the children's typology. The analysis showed that the most suitable combination was the one that created 4 Typologies of out-of-school children. The four Typologies created were analyzed for differences between them through Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for some of the variables taken into analysis.

5.4D. Ethical Considerations

Child interviews were conducted by trained experts and in the presence of the Child or Parent Protection Unit. The parents were previously asked for permission to interview the child and agreed with the child. The questionnaire does not collect personal or identifiable data for any of the participants.

5.5 Limitations

This document combines quantitative methodology, questionnaires with children, and qualitative focus group / workshop with professionals, enabling the triangulation of data between literature, children's perceptions and expert perceptions. However, the fact that only this group is studied, comparing with other groups of the child for similar data is difficult. Secondly, in conditions when there is no complete and agreed register or contacts of out-of-school children, intentional and layered sampling is intended, which makes it possible to gather the necessary information but does not enable generalization.

VI. RESULTS OF THE POLL

This section presents the results processed by the questionnaires with children. First, the findings of a descriptive nature are presented for the whole group of children according to the sections, then it is followed by the presentation of the typologies of the children and the distinctive characteristics of each group. The last part of the analysis is a summary of the findings from the discussion with the experts, with whom a part of the findings and their perceptions and suggestions for the improvement of the protection system of these children were discussed through DCM no. 666.

6.1 Demographic data

141 children from 6 cities Tirana, Berat, Durrës, Bulqiza, Peshkopi and Korça participated in this study. 53% of children are girls and 47% are boys.

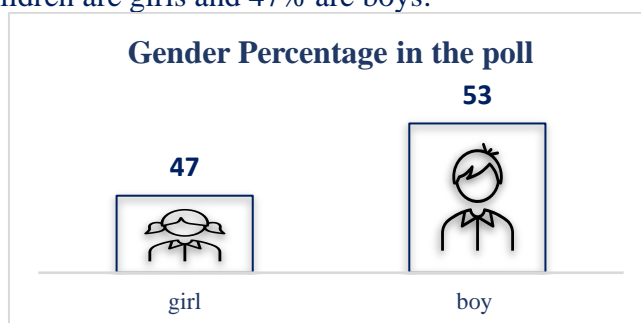


Figure 7: Gender percentage of poll participants

The age of the participating children varies from 7 to 17 years old, with an average of 11.9 years old. As can be seen in the graph, the highest age concentration is observed between the ages of 10-15 years.

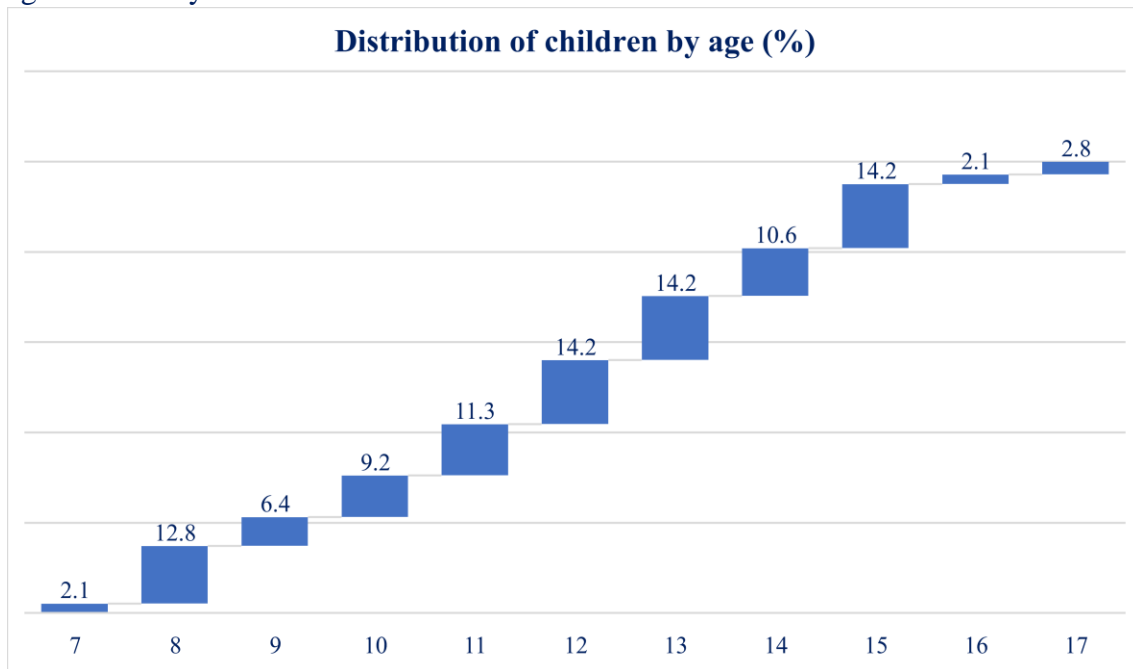


Figure 8: Percentage of OOSC interviewed by age

Most of the children interviewed are from Tirana Municipality (34.8% of them), followed by: Municipality of Korça (21.3%), Municipality of Berat (18.4%), Municipality of Bulqizë with 11.3%, Municipality of Dibër (6.4%) and Municipality of Elbasan (0.7%).

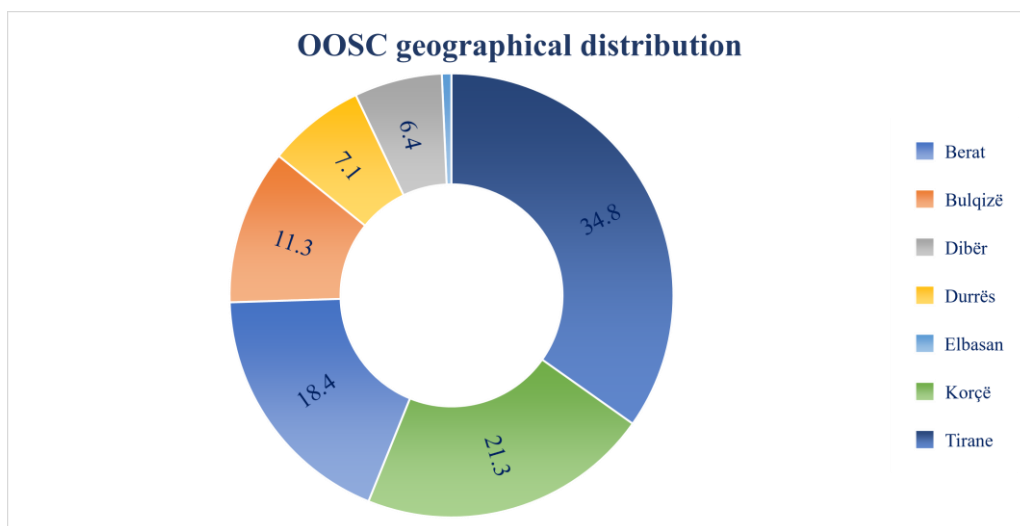


Figure 9: Town where OOSC come from

The distribution of children by the school grade they attend is more representative for grades: III; IV; V and VII.

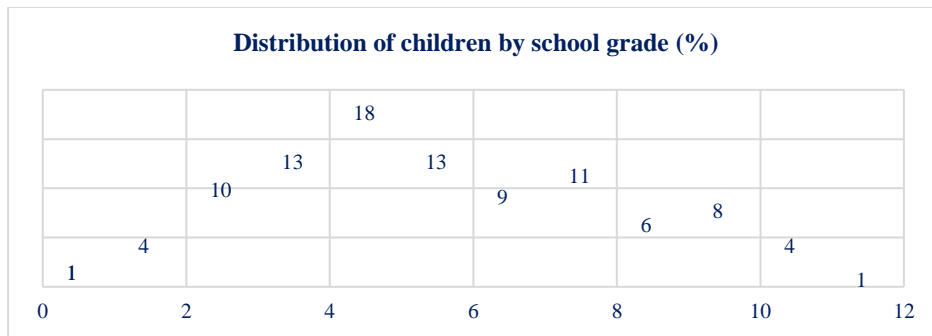


Figure 10: OOSC distribution by school grade (%)

Most of the children interviewed came from poor families and 82% of children live in poverty and of these 38% of children belong to the Roma community; 21% of respondents live in street situation and 15% of children interviewed live in families with violent environment.

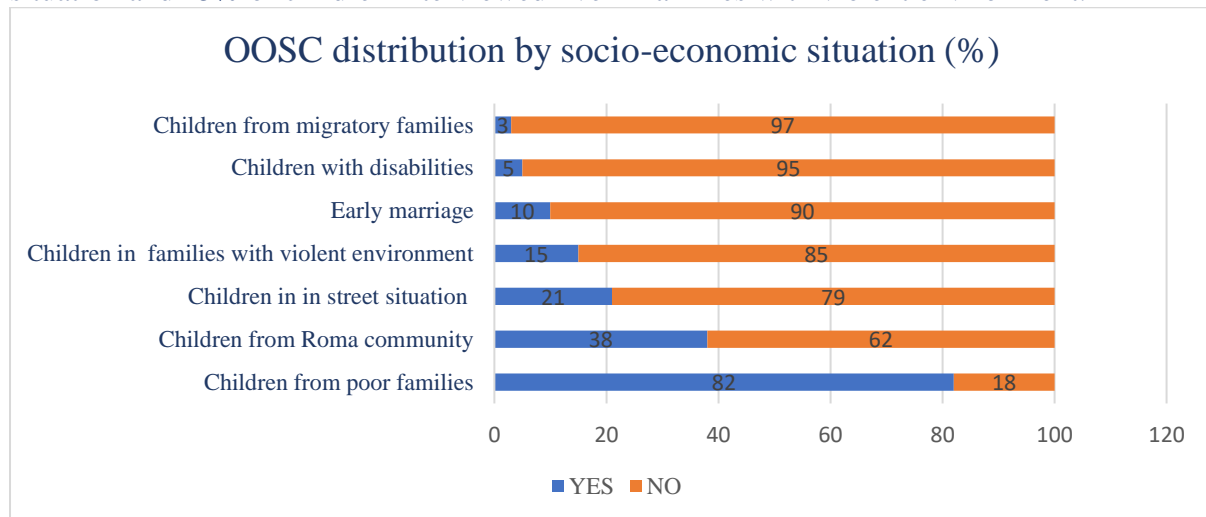


Figure 11: OOSC distribution according to socio-economic settings

The analysis of the data shows that the vast majority of children, 82% come from families with problems with poverty, but the data show that only 43% of these families are treated with economic assistance and only 28% of these families have benefited from DCM no. 666¹¹.

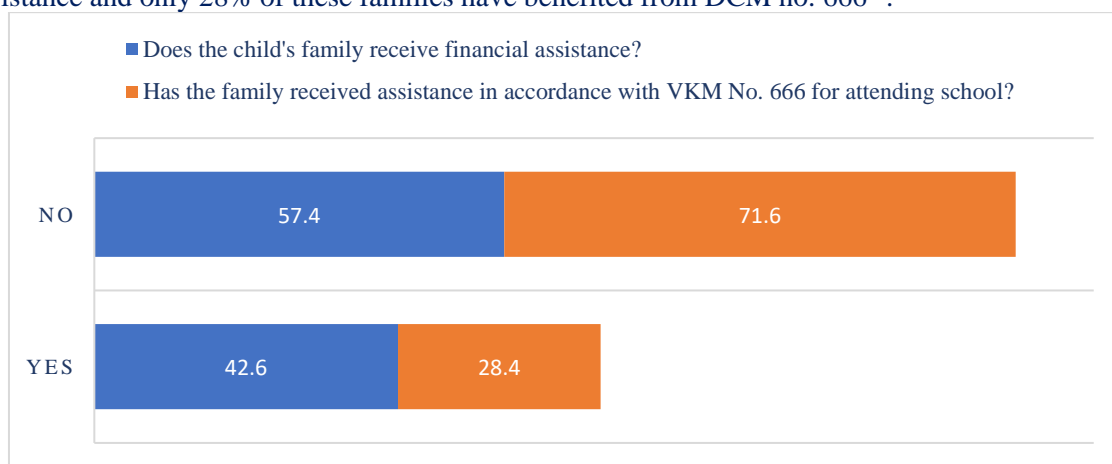


Figure 12: Poverty assistance and scholarship support for OOSC (%)

¹¹ DCM 666 is a decree of the Government of Albania that regulates the process of distributing need based scholarships to children who are risking dropout and becoming OOSC. The funding for this scholarship comes from the Ministry of Education and Sports and the distribution of it is shared between local government unit and educational directorates.

During the interview process 29% of the children revealed that they had completely abandoned school compared to 44% who stated that they had partially attended school.

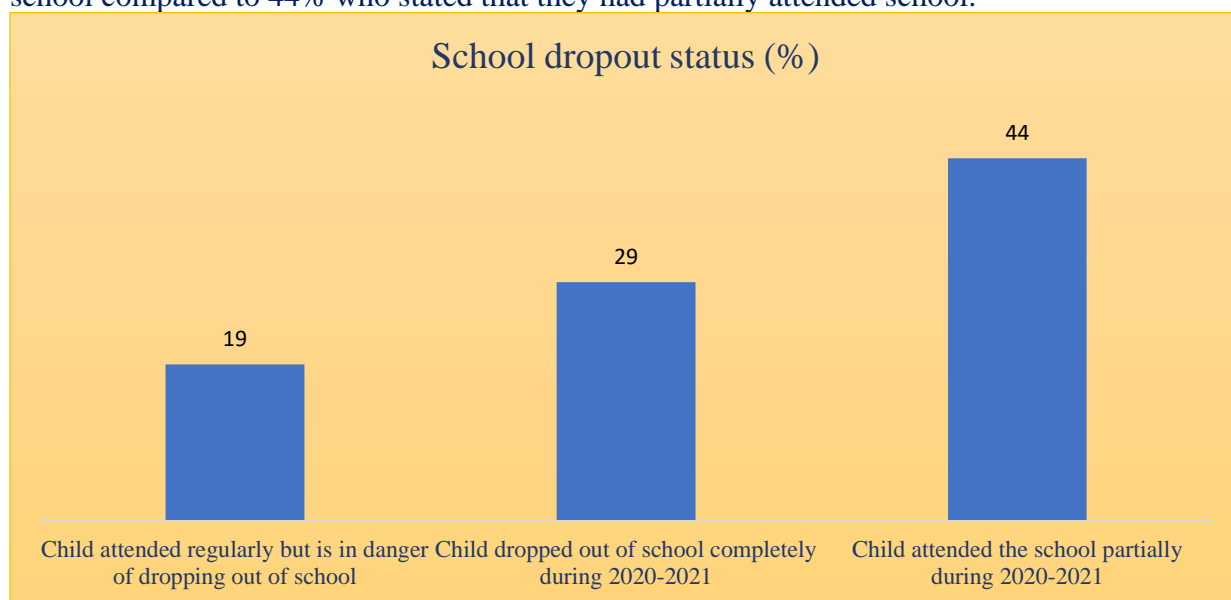


Figure 13: Status of dropout among interviewed children

When children were asked about the reasons for not benefitting from the scholarship programme for children who are poor and risking dropout, they ranked lack of information at the top.

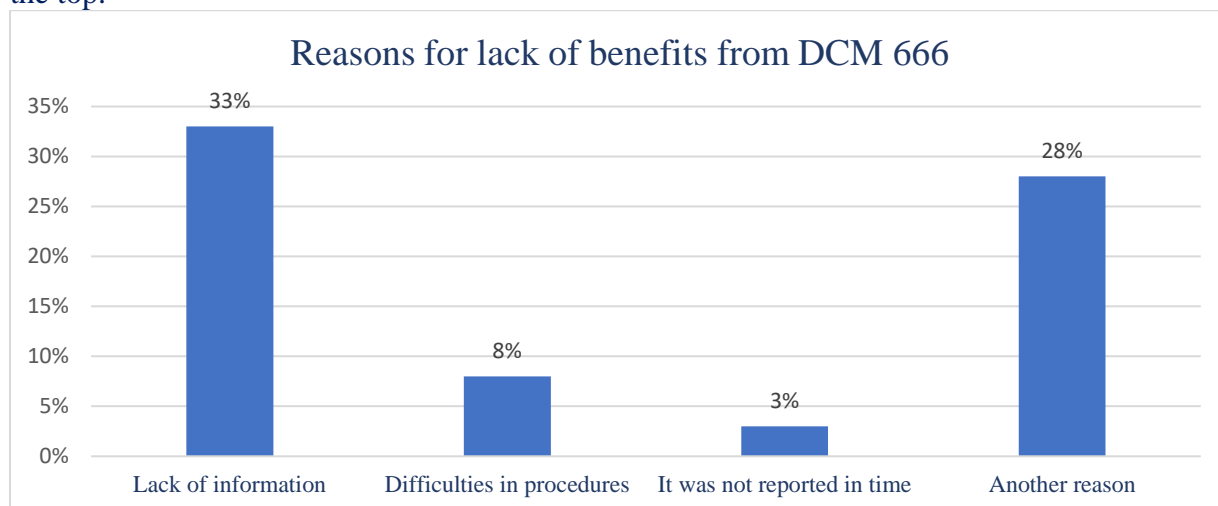


Figure 14: Reasons that OOSC did not benefit from DCM 666

For most children there was no single reason for not attending school. They were asked to choose from a list of 9 options that best described the reasons for dropping out of school. As the table below shows, the main reason why children do not attend school is the economic impossibility of their family - 49% of children have chosen it as the main cause. Another 15% of children say they do not like school, although this answer is often associated with other alternatives. 10% of children say that their family does not let them attend and 7% because they work. An even fewer number of children do not attend school because they take care of sick relatives or other children. A small group has also listed distance-based education as a reason (5%). Four children claimed school distance as the reason for dropping out of it while two others mentioned difficulties in enrolment.

Table 2: Reasons for dropping out of school

Reasons for not attending school	%	nr
Family does not have enough income	49	65
Child does not like school	15	20
Child does not leave family	10	13
Child works	7	9
Child takes care of sick family members	5	7
Classes took place online and there was no way to attend	5	7
Child takes care of siblings	5	7
Child lives far away from the school	3	4
Child run into problems enrolling in school, cannot enroll	1	2
Total	100	134

Data analysis of the interviews regarding the risk factors for non-enrollment, non-attendance and school dropout by children showed the following to be as key factors they:

- Individuals (learning problems)
- Family members (mentality, economic impossibility, lack of parental involvement in the child's education, early marriage)
- Community (distance of school from residence, lack of documents and non-registration as a citizen)
- School (fear of school, low scores due to bullying, persistent dropout leading to dropout)

6.2 Family situation

The problem of school dropout is multi-factorial, however the family, its composition and functioning are very important factors that contribute to drop out. The family composition, family size, parents' level of education and employment, parents' emigration status, poverty and domestic violence were considered in the interviews with the children. On average children live in families with 4 to 6 members, the smallest number of family members is 2 and the largest number is 12. One third of the parents of the interviewed children are without education, one in two parents has eight-year education and less than one in 10 parents has secondary education and only two children have parents with higher education.

OOSC parental education level (%)

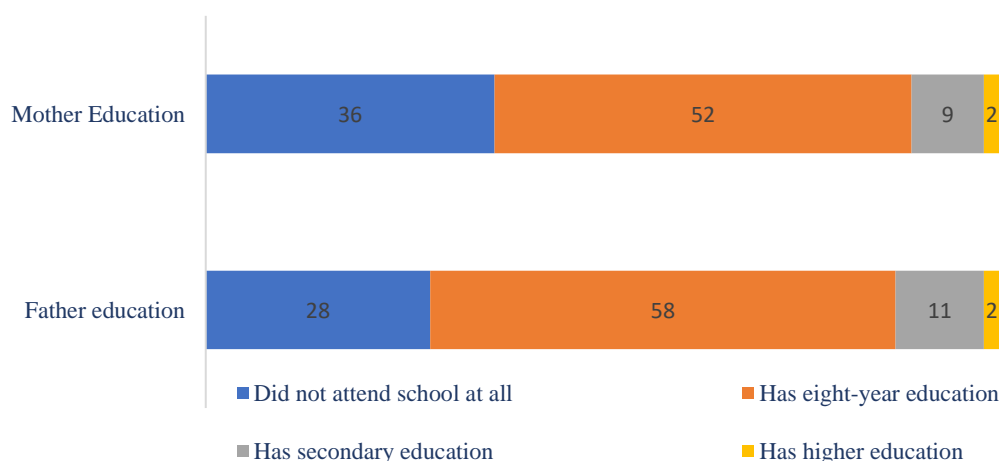


Figure 15: Level of education of OOSC parents

The data show that parental employment is also a contributing factor to the lack of financial stability of the family. A high percentage of children have unemployed parents, 27% of fathers and 47% have mothers, or with irregular employment, 47% of fathers and 24% of mothers. One in ten children has one or both parents part-time or full-time employed, 16% of fathers and 19% of mothers respectively.

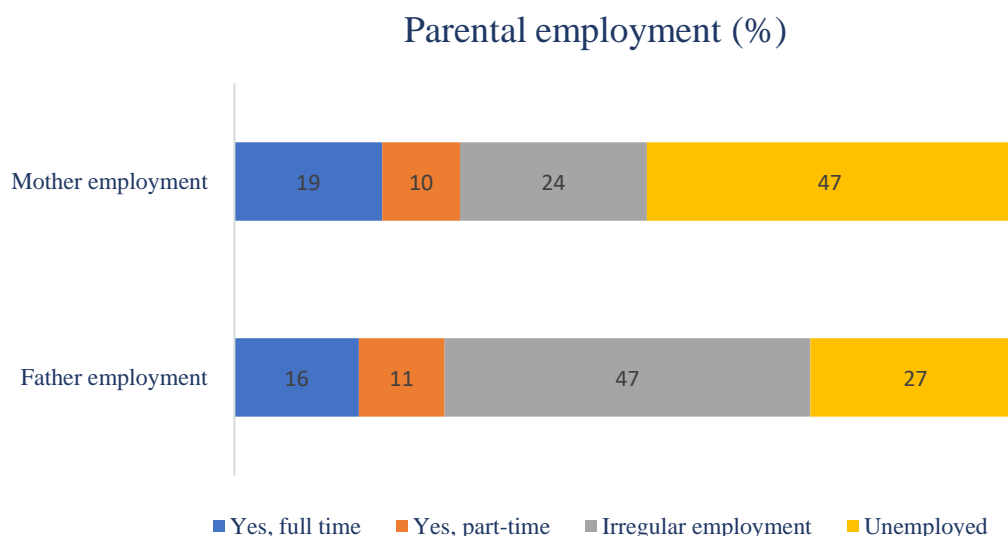


Figure 16: Parental employment status

Absence of parents is also a contributing factor in school dropout. About one in three children has a working father away from home and one in 5 children has a working mother away from home. There are 30 children (21%) who are working while the rest are do not seem to be engaged in work. A cross-sectional analysis shows that the number of employed children increases with age.

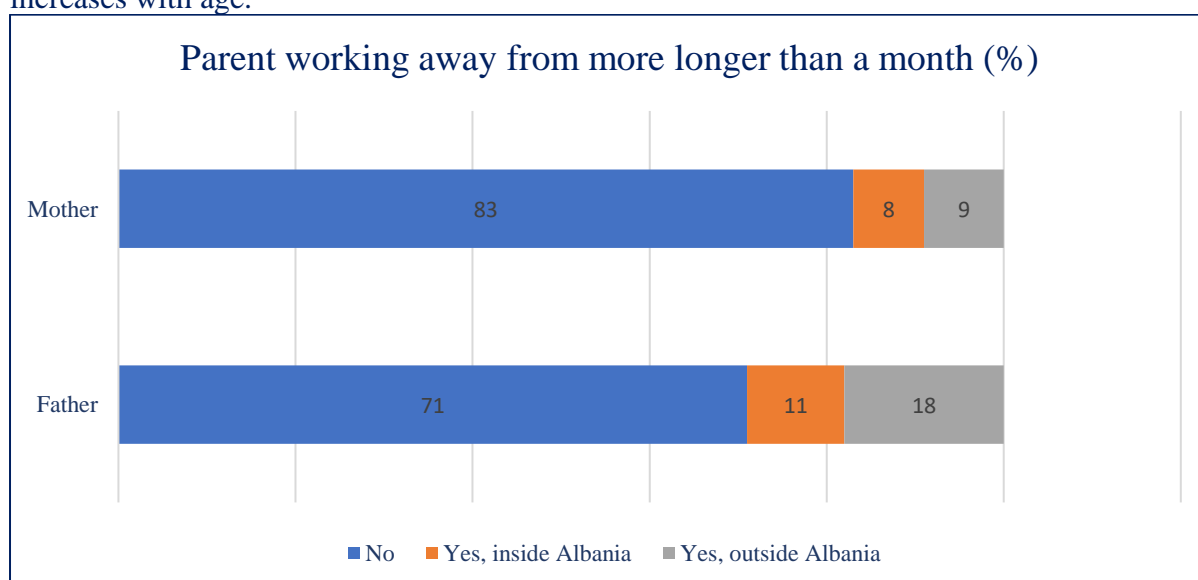


Figure 17: Parent of OOSC working away from home

There was only one 16-year-old child who was engaged in salaried work. There are 15 OOSC aged between 10 -17 who work part-time, and 14 others aged 8 -17 who do unpaid work to support their families. According to table 3, below, children work an average of 3.5 hours a day, with older children working longer hours.

Table 3: OOSC involvement in jobs

Does the child work to help the family?	Average age	Number of children	Minimum age	Maximum age	Average working hours
Yes, works part-time	16.0	1	16	16	4.0
Yes, works part-time	13.6	15	10	17	4.0
Works but unpaid, helps family	12.7	14	8	17	2.6
Does not work	11.5	111	7	17	
Total	11.9	141	7	17	3.5

OOSC interviewed also considered lack of parental support or encouragement to attend school as a contributing factor for their decision to drop out. Only 7% of children said that their parents always helped them with homework and school, 19% stated sometimes, 29% rarely and 45% of children stated that their parents never supported them with their homework or school.

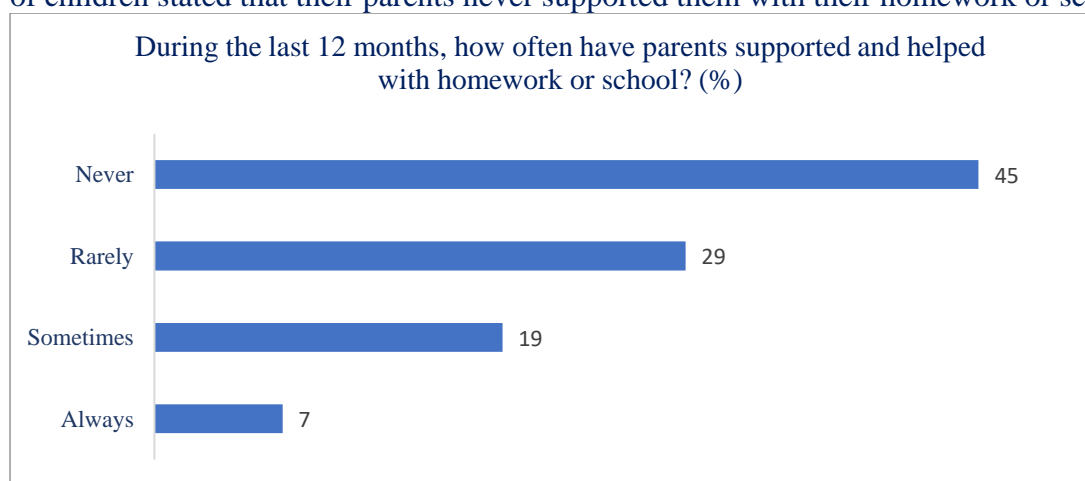


Figure 18: OOSC parental support with school and schoolwork

6.3 School situation

The school represents another important eco-system related to the education of the children and their psycho-social support. 87% of children of the children interviewed walk to school and spend on average 12 minutes to get to and from school (2-25 minutes). There were only 16 children who used transportation to reach their school and it was their families that were covering their travel costs and not the local government.

When the children were asked about their relationship with the school 32% responded that they wanted to go to school; 30% responded that they kind of wanted to attend school; 37% of them did not like going to school and 9% hated going to school.

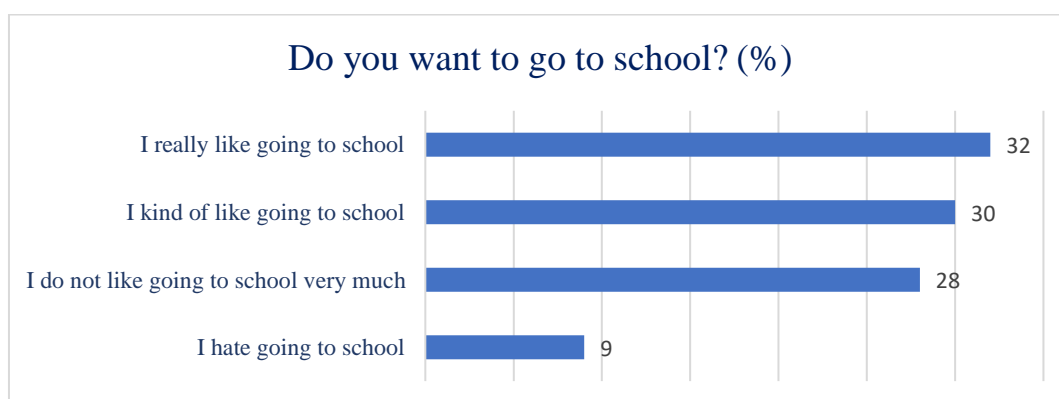


Figure 19: OOSC attitude towards school

Children's involvement in school social life is also limited as 67% of them were not engaged in any activity organized in school while only 10% of them are engaged in more than three school activities.

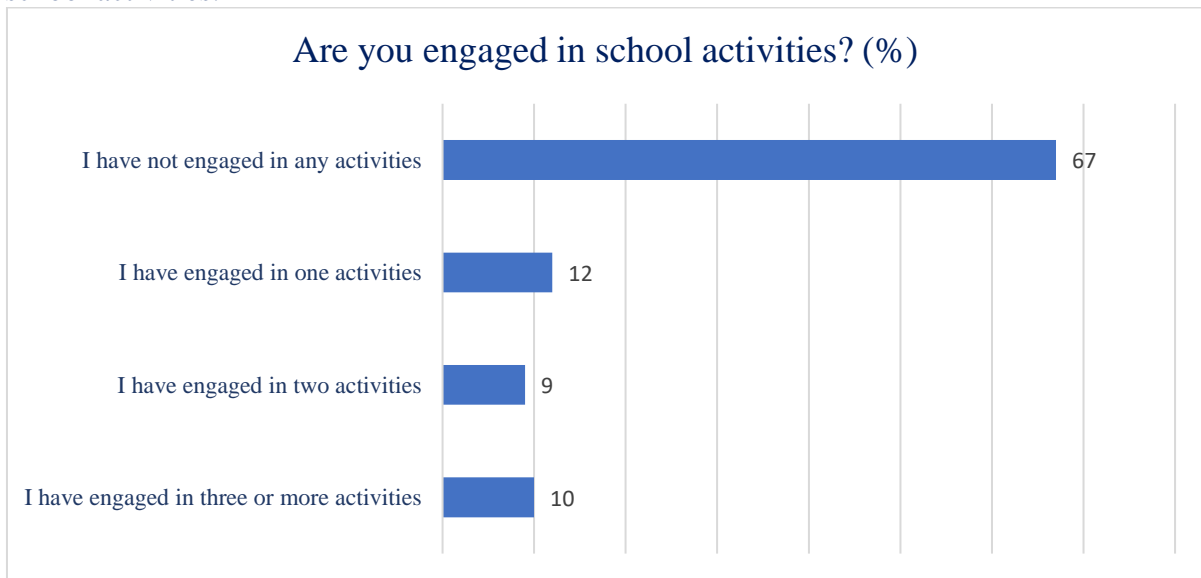


Figure 20: OOSC engagement in school activities

Social service provision in schools is also incomplete. Children noticed social workers only in 30% of the cases and psychologists in 67% of the cases.



Figure 21: Presence of school psychologist or social worker in school

Only 7% of the children interviewed seemed to have had frequent communication with psychosocial services of the school they attended. 20% of children said that the social worker went to visit with their family several times and 15% that they went only once. The focus group discussion made it even more evident that the psycho-social service in schools is insufficient and sometimes even ineffective.

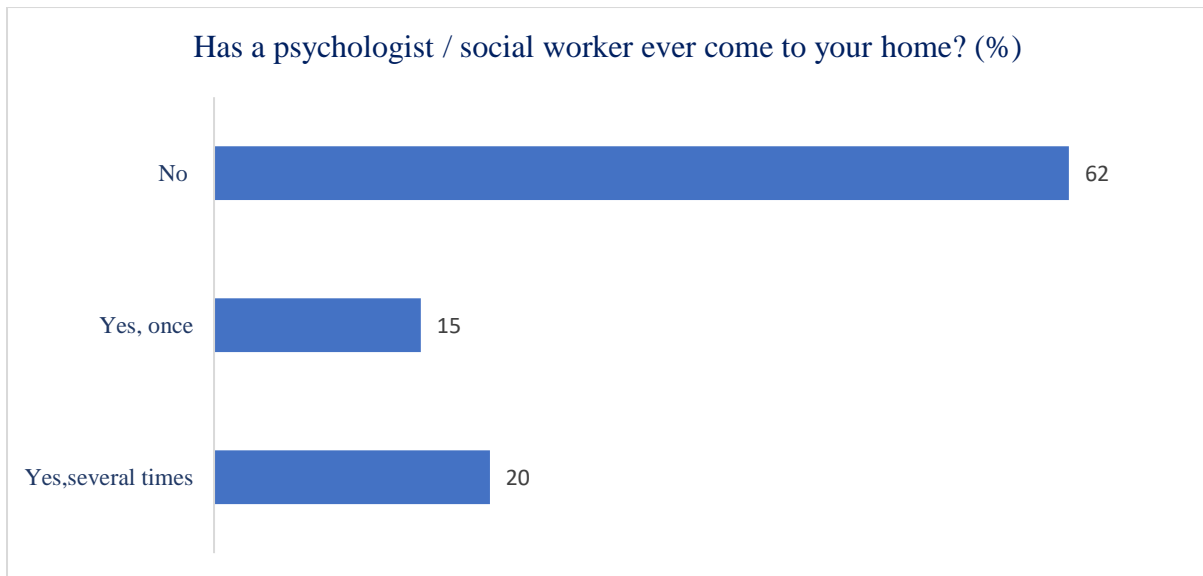


Figure 22: Home visits of psychologist / social worker to OOSC

During 2020-2021 part of the learning process was remote and moved online. Attendance was closely related to presence of internet connection and devices to connect remotely. In total, 45% of the children interviewed did not attend school online, 26% attended it irregularly and only 9% stated that they attended online schooling.

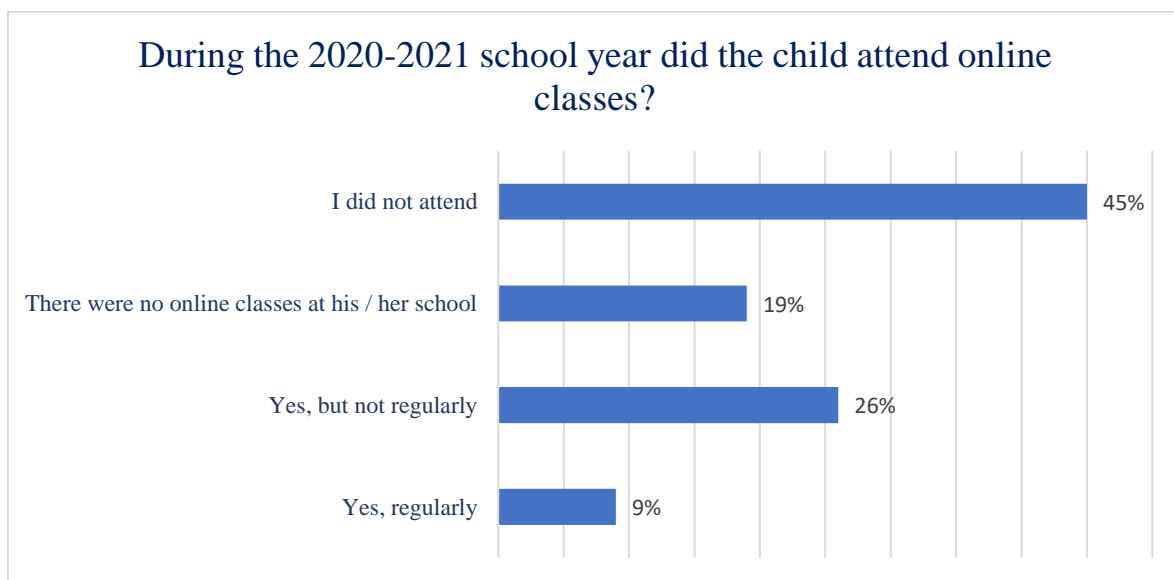


Figure 23: OOSC and school online during COVID-19 pandemic lock down

Only 7% of children had their own cellphone through which they could attend online learning, 27% followed it through the cellphone of a family member and 2% through the cellphone of their friends. The same situation is presented for internet connection where 31% did not have enough internet, 45% had most of the time, and only 25% had internet all the time. Only 8% had fixed internet connection, another 8% connected via Wi-Fi and the rest got internet from mobile phone packages.

The children were also asked for their opinion on the suitability of the physical conditions (infrastructure) of their school and only 44% said that they fully agreed with the statement “My school has very good physical conditions suitable to my needs”

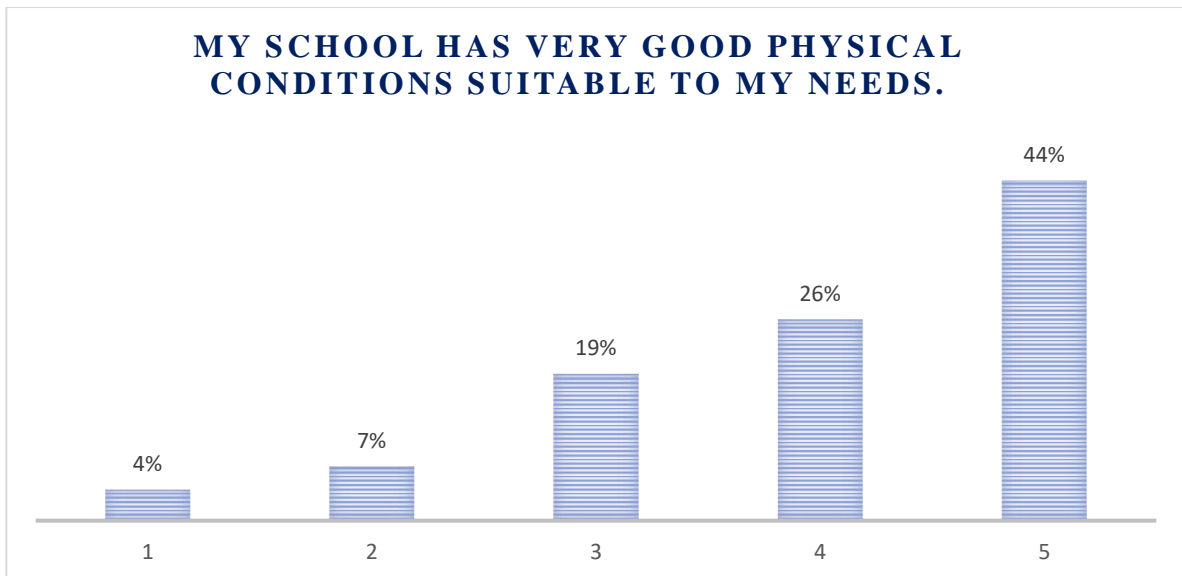


Figure 24: OOSC and school infrastructure

6.4 Poverty

Poverty was measured by developing a measurement scale based on 13 appliance and equipment variables¹² used to capture subjective child welfare¹³ and its testing showed that it had a very good internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.720). The average of appliances that a household owns is 8.

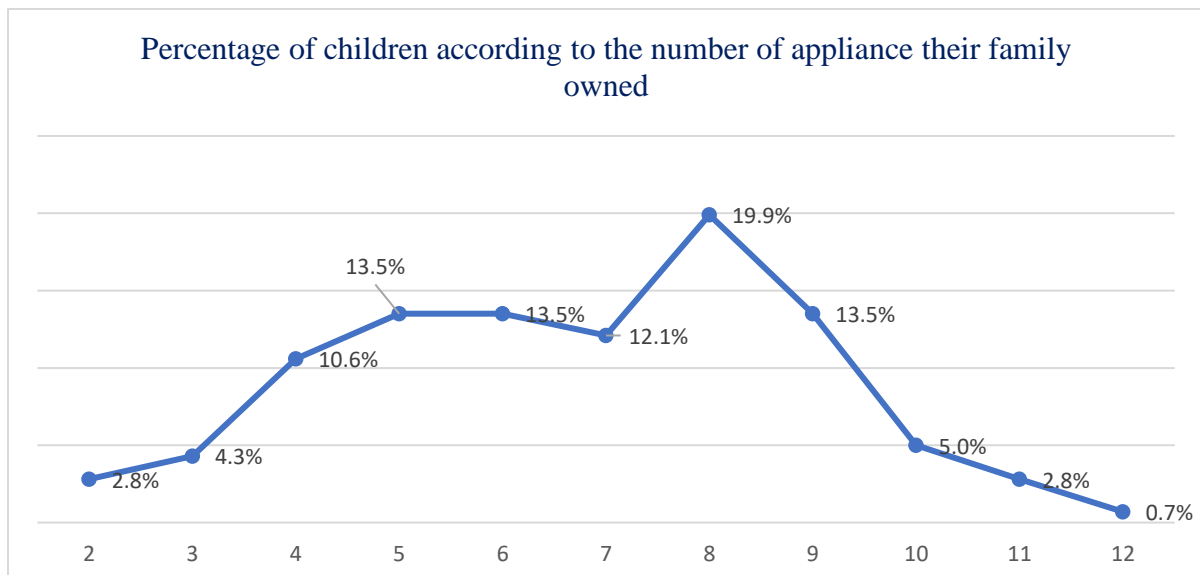


Figure 25: OOSC family poverty rate based on appliances indicators

Figure above shows that households owning 1-4 appliances have a low level of appliance possession that is translated into a high level of poverty is about 19%. Households possessing

¹² Computer, including laptops and tablets, TV, Refrigerator / freezer, Radio, Telephone, landline or mobile, Family car / van / motorcycle etc., Running water, Electricity, washing machine, Travel with family during the year last, food to eat every day

¹³ ISCIWEB: <https://iscweb.org/the-data/publications/country-reports/country-reports-of-the-third-wave-2016-2019/>

5-8 domestic appliances present moderate level of poverty. Those households possessing 9-12 appliances 22% are not poor.

6.5 Violence and bullying

Survey data show that out-of-school children interviewed are children coming from vulnerable groups facing problems of violence and bullying. They were exposed to violence in family relationships, school, and community. 15% of the children who were interviewed were classified by the interviewer as children coming from a situation of violence. The most common form of bullying encountered by almost one in two children was verbal violence from peers that ranks closely with peer exclusion. Children were less likely to face physical violence as in only 22% of the responses they faces physical violence once a week or less.

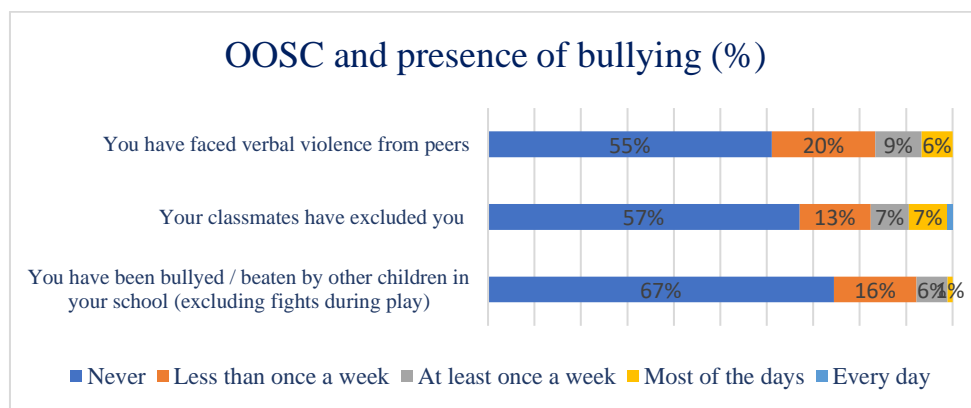


Figure 26: Frequency of bullying behavior towards children

Three components that are very important for the well-being and development of children as well as basic needs for their development are physical safety, family care and teacher support in family, school, and community settings. Children interviewed do not get support from the community or their peers. They have answered with “do not agree” responses to questions for these categories of support.

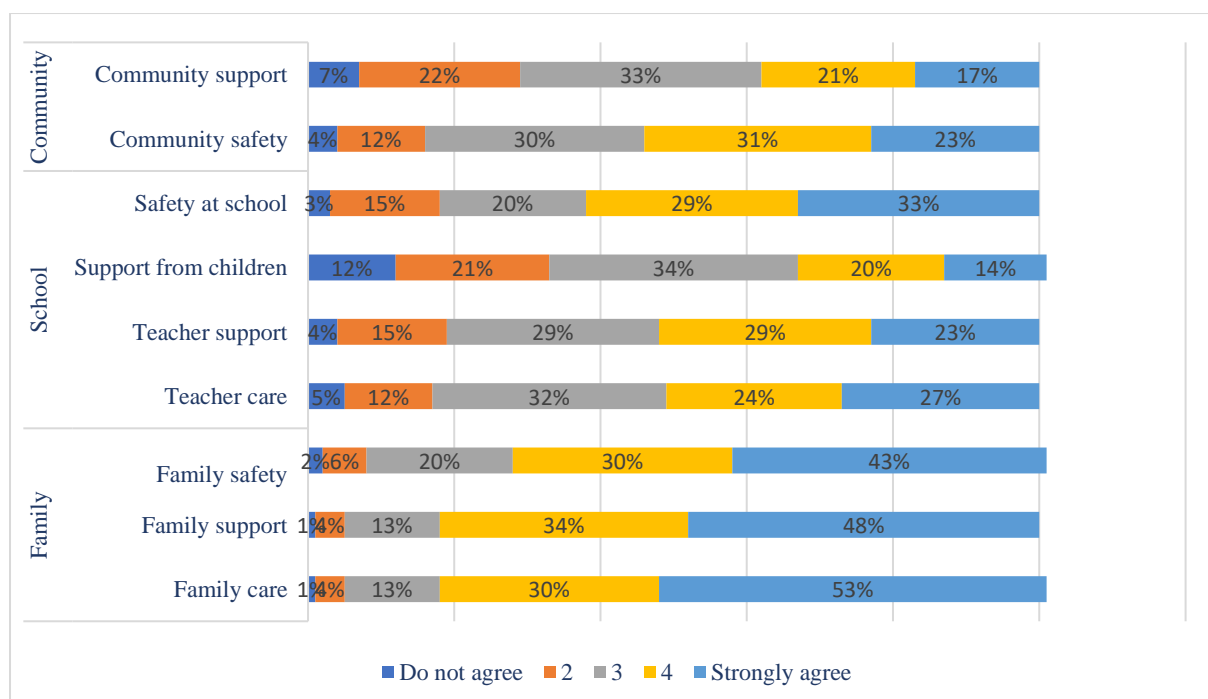


Figure 27: OOSC and presence of safety, care and support in family, school and community settings

VII. TYPOLOGIES OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

Two Step Cluster analysis is a method by which large data sets are grouped into smaller similar data sets. This method is very efficient when several models are present in the data sets. Identification of similar typologies (profiles) reduces the complexity of the analysis¹⁴. Eight binary variables were developed in the analysis (coded 1 = yes and 2 = no):

- Children from poor family
- Children from Roma / Egyptian families
- Children from migrant families
- Children with disabilities
- Early marriage
- Children in street situations
- Children from families with violent environments

The combination of these variables resulted in four typologies of out-of-school children:

1. **Typology 1:** Roma / Egyptian children and poor 27% (n = 38)
2. **Typology 2:** Children from a violent environment and poor 20.6% (n = 29)
3. **Typology 3:** Children in street situations, Roma / Egyptians and poor 16.3 % (n = 23)
4. **Typology 4:** Poor children 36.2% (n = 51)

There were three variables that did not have much impact on the creation of the 4 typologies including early marriage, emigration family and disability. It is important to note that the small number of children in the survey played a role in making these three variables less indicative. Children facing problems with the law were also excluded from this analysis as their number was very limited too. The results that follow are cases of significant statistical relationships between the typologies and variables analyzed through the survey results.

7.1 Gender

There is a statistically significant relationship between gender and typology developed. The number of boys is higher than the number of girls and they are in higher percentages in three of the groups, poor children, children from violent and poor environment and children in street situation and Roma and Egyptians. Girls, meanwhile, are more present in the group of poor Roma and Egyptian children.

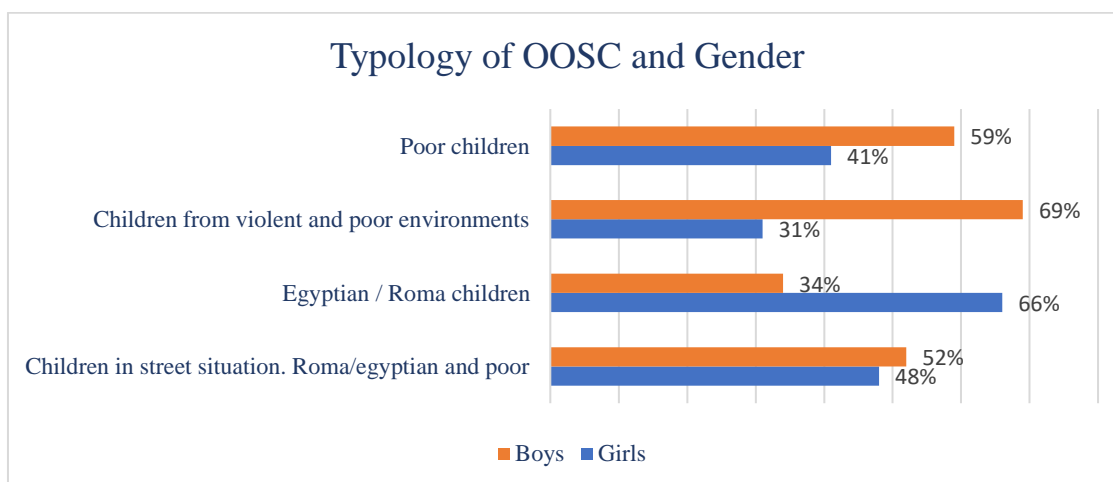


Figure 28: OOSC typology and gender

¹⁴ Desjardins, G. (2021, July). Two-stage cluster analysis in distance learning: A way to reduce gaps in the scientific literature in DOL. In *International Congress on Research Methodology-Qualis* (Vol. 7, p. 9).

7.2 Level of benefit from DCM no. 666 according to typologies

Statistically significant changes are also noticed in the level of benefits from DCM no. 666 regarding scholarships for OOSC. 72% of children did not benefit from DCM no. 666. The comparison between the groups showed that the highest percentage of children who benefited are poor children and children in street situations, respectively 41 and 48% beneficiaries. Children who had benefited less are those in violent environments.

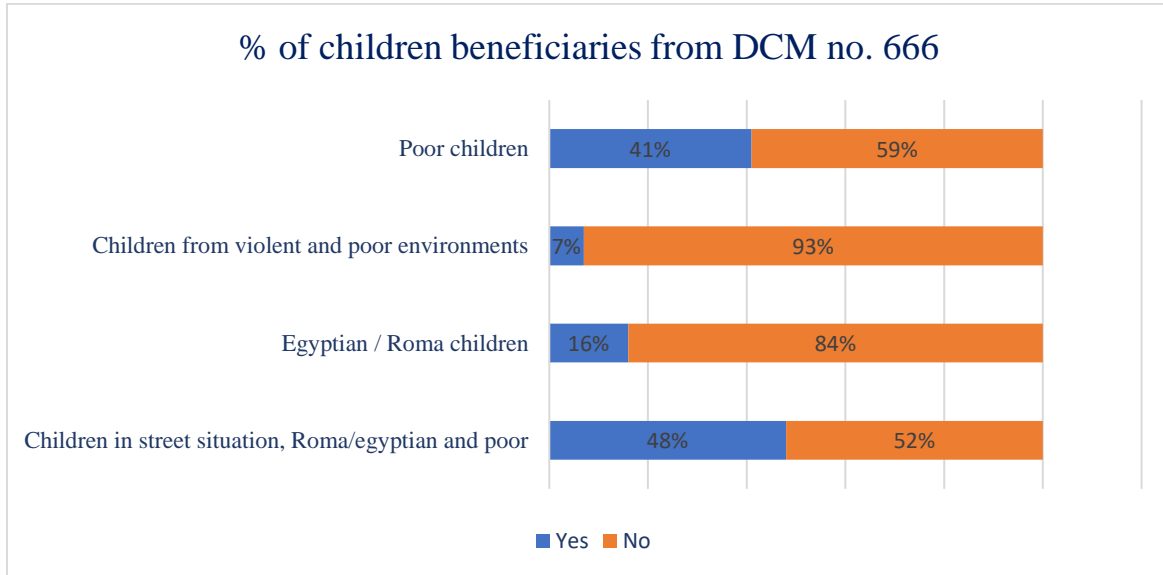


Figure 29 OOSC typologies and beneficiaries of DCM 666 scholarships

7.3 Parents' education

Children in street situations and Roma and Egyptian children more often than other children have uneducated parents. On average, the parents of poor children had the highest level of education including 2% who had parents with higher education. The changes in the level of education of the parents were statistically significant for the level of education of the mother.

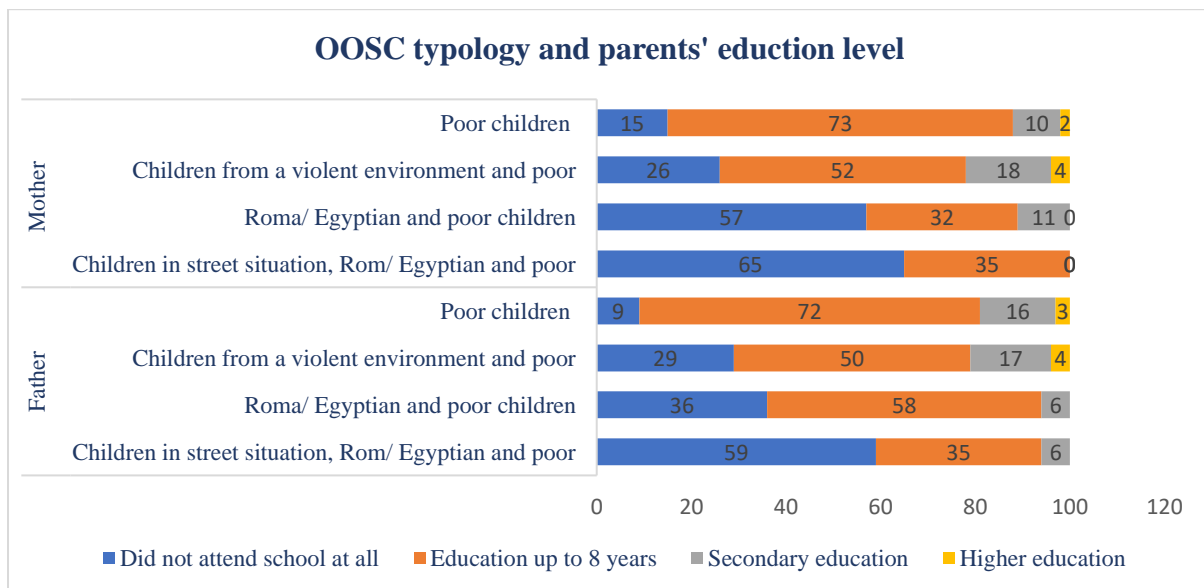


Figure 30: OOSC and parents' education relationship

7.4 School attendance

With regards to school attendance during the academic year 2020-2021, no statistically significant changes were observed in the level of attendance between children of different groups.

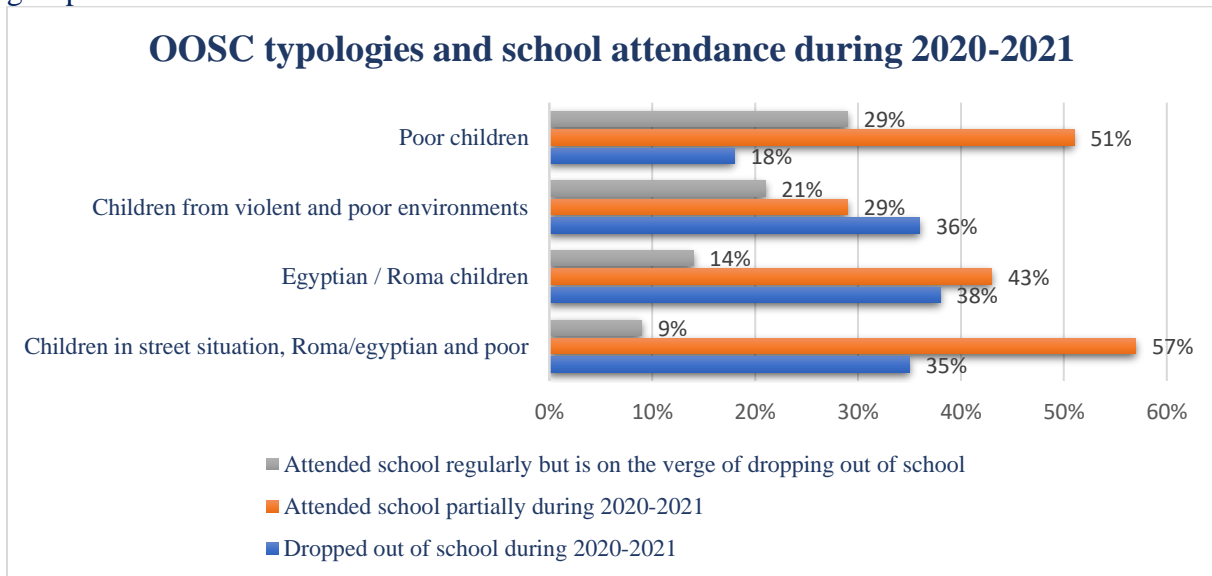


Figure 31: OOSC typologies and school attendance rates

The changes were significant for remote schooling as 76% of children in street situations, 55% of children in violent environments and 46% of Roma and Egyptian children did not attend remote schooling. Only 24% of poor children had not attended online school while the typology Roma / Egyptian and poor children did not attend online education.

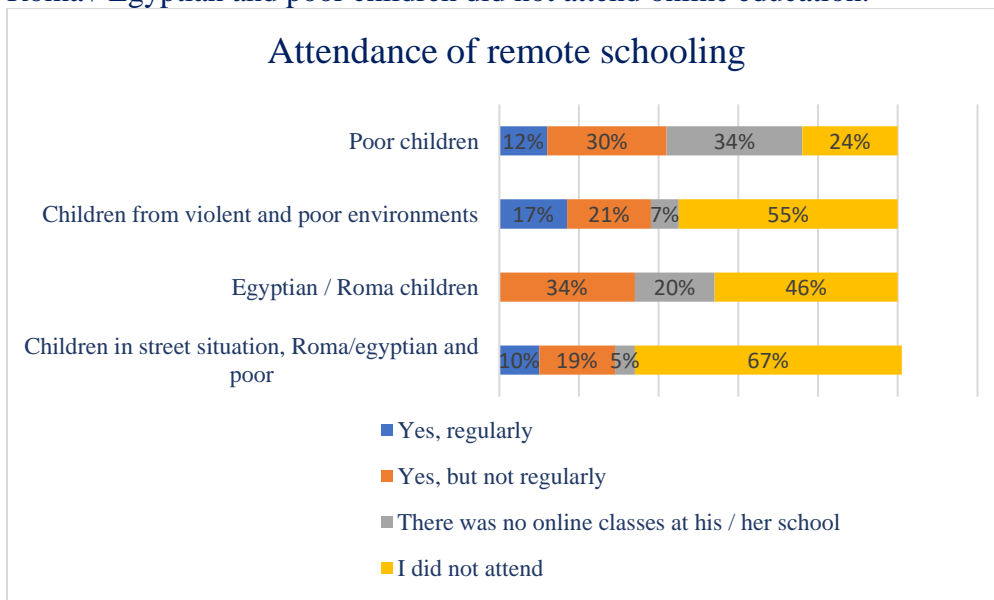


Figure 32: OOSC typologies and remote schooling relationship

7.5 School experience and engagement in school activities

No statistically significant differences were observed between children in different groups in terms of how they felt about school, although the largest percentage of children who liked school a lot coincided with the “poor child” typology by 49%. In other groups this percentage was much lower.

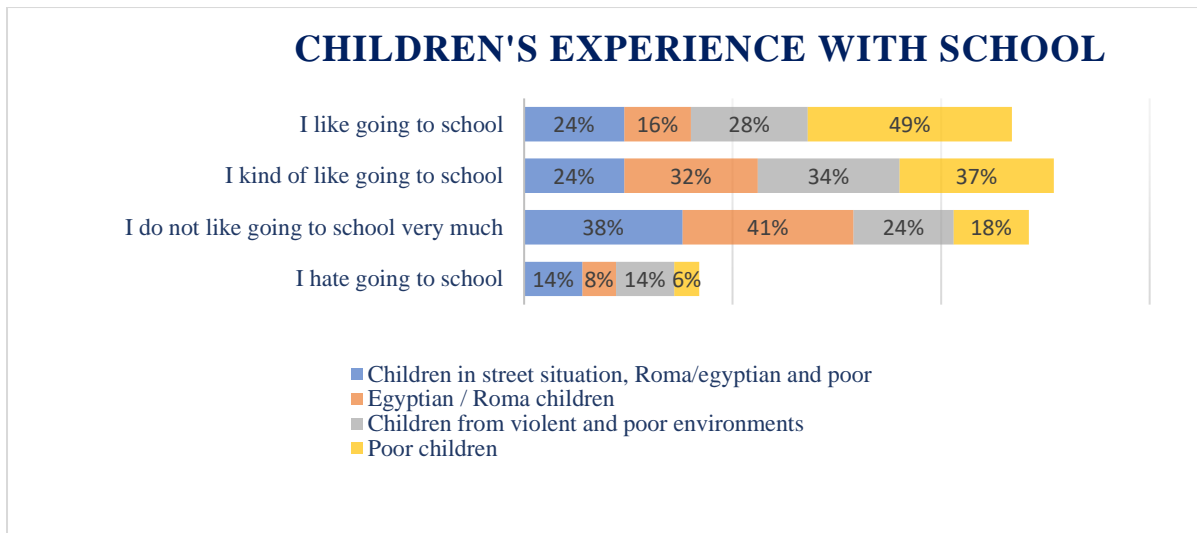


Figure 33: OOSC typologies and school experience

The changes become significant for the level of engagement in school activities. 87% of Roma and Egyptian children, 81% of children in street situations, 64% of children from violent environment and 47% of poor children did not engage in any school activities during the school year 2020-2021. Poor children had the highest percentage of regular engagement of school activities.

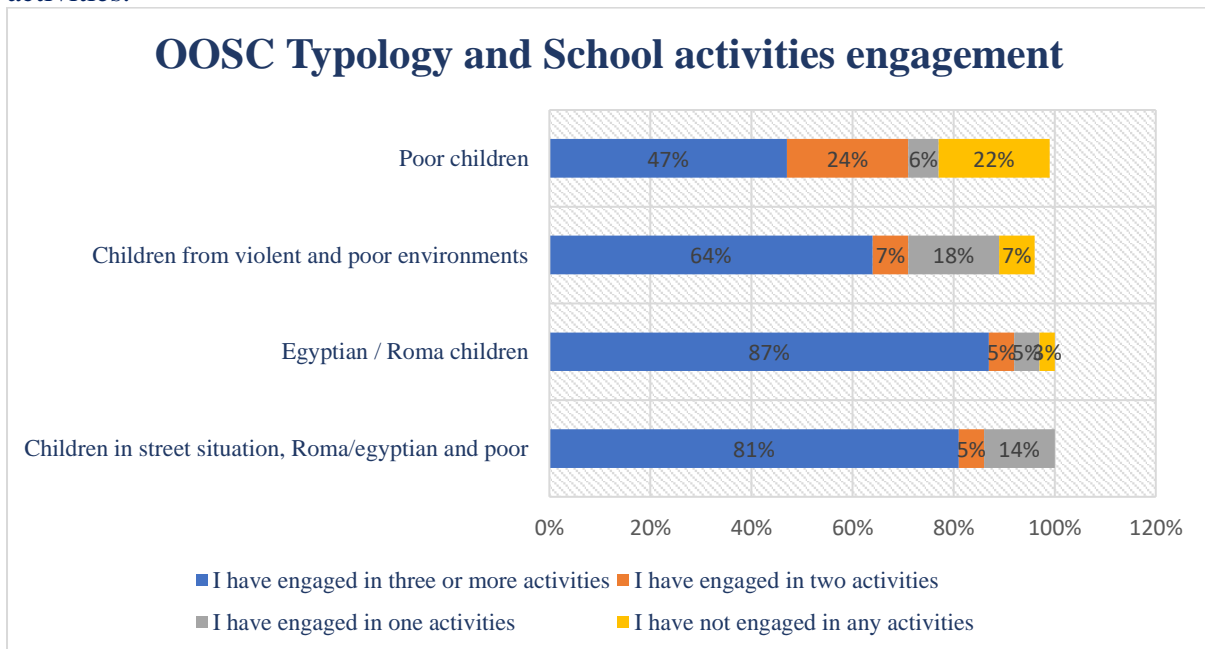


Figure 34 OOSC typology and school activity engagement

7.6 Coping with bullying behavior

The data indicate that almost half of the children in all groups have faced one of the forms of bullying at least once in the month the survey took place. There were no differences regarding the level of perception of different forms of bullying among the 4 groups of children. Statistically significant differences were observed only in the question: 'Have you ever felt excluded from peers' and poor children had much higher percentages than the other alternative groups ever, 76%. This percentage is lower for the other typologies.

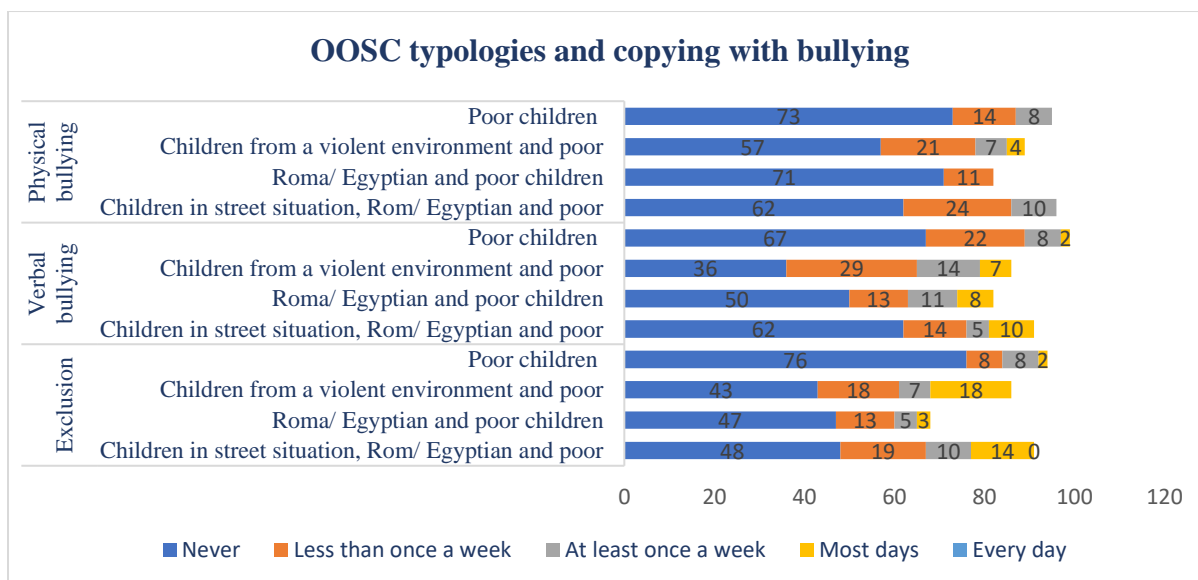


Figure 35: OOSC typology and copying with physical and verbal bullying and exclusion

In conclusion of the analysis of typologies poverty is the common denominator of all typologies developed. It is important to account for other elements though including care and support for children that was higher for Roma and Egyptian families resulting from the cultural and community affiliation those children experience.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The monitoring of the reports shows the lack of accurate and unreliable statistics for out-of-school children for each municipality and the reported figures do not consider children who have left the country but are still registered in the civil registry. Establishing a sustainable system of norms, procedures, criteria, and institutional and community responsibilities to reduce school dropout and increase the level of education of children and young people remains a challenge for Albania, although steps have been taken to consolidate the educational system, to increase the qualifications and training of pedagogical staff, and to inform parents about financial support for OOSC.

Poverty is the common denominator of all typologies of out-of-school children created through the analysis of survey responses of 141 OOSC, *however all other elements such as ethnicity or living in a violent environment* should be taken into consideration in both identifying the problem and assessing and addressing it. The analysis showed that *children from the Roma and Egyptian communities* face more prejudice and are less engaged in school life. Meanwhile children coming from the violent environment need greater protection as they feel more insecure. The cultural context in which Roma and Egyptian children live makes them more vulnerable as their parents are less educated and less employed but at the same time their community affiliation offers them a greater sense of support and care. This perception helps them cope better with the different forms of bullying.

Even more in-depth analyzes are needed, as out-of-school children come from different backgrounds and the forms of their treatment and approach to school need to be tailored to the characteristics of each group of children. Clear identification of quality and groups of out-of-school children is also necessary to determine the criteria on which the decision is made for service recipients.

The community, parents and every member of society have a direct and indirect impact on the empowerment and effectiveness of the dropout prevention scheme. Continuous information of these actors can affect family and community safety, whether or not to motivate children to go to school or to refer cases of children who are in a school dropout situation. *Raising ongoing awareness and information on child support programs with scholarships or services to facilitate their school attendance should be an integral part of informing and raising public awareness on dropout issues.*

The work of identifying abandoned children requires that each actor in the scheme coordinates and organizes joint efforts in order to identify children at risk of abandonment. The psycho-social sector in the school, among others, has the task of identifying cases of children who have long absences from school for no reason, or come from families with social problems and families which may affect their attendance at school. The study shows that this sector is very little present in identifying these children and building individual development plans to help them. Also, their partnership with the teacher in assessing the status of the Child in dropout situation is almost absent in all the experiences reported in the report. *One of the report recommendations is to strengthen the role of the school psychologist and social worker in coordinating joint institutional efforts to identify and assess children at risk of school dropout. Also, a more active involvement of the entire psycho-social service network in the process of identifying, evaluating and supporting all cases.*

According to the report, the most vulnerable groups of children left out of school are children with various social problems, children of Roma and Egyptian minorities, children who work to

help their families, children who are not registered in the civil registry, etc. Educational institutions can play an irreplaceable role in preventing school dropout. These children are the ones who are often absent from school, sometimes for long periods of time. However, the definition of “school dropout child” is perceived to be not very clear among professionals implementing the scheme by identifying the need to clarify the characteristics of children at risk of dropout. *Prevention by institutions requires training focused on understanding and clearly identifying characteristics of children who do not attend or are often absent from school and who may be at risk of dropping out.*

In the case of Albania, a relatively small country, incidence of OOSC can be completely reduced if all these stakeholders work to optimal capacity. Better inter-governmental cooperation and effective cooperation of actors at the local level – would contribute directly to the lowering of school non-attendance. Moreover, without systematic impact assessments of policies aimed at boosting participation and fighting drop-out, it is impossible to accurately indicate priority areas of intervention for improving the situation of these children or means to make current programmes and strategies more efficient and more effective. Starting from the analysis of available data, this last section of the report tries however to formulate a series of general recommendations relevant to all OOSC categories.

Although **these recommendations** are applicable to all the five dimensions of exclusion targeted in the OOSC methodology, the main focus is placed on dimensions 2 and 3 – primary and lower secondary school children at risk of dropping out.

- **Collecting and Reporting Drop-Out Data** can be a difficult process if government authorities do not participate effectively in it. The process can be relatively straightforward if all the parties participate in the process and also let the educational authorities lead the process. On the other hand, sluggish progress related to the implementation of a digital EMIS system is preventing country wide progress. Swift action needs to be taken to develop the system in order not to lose the positive momentum created by the OOSC.
- **Developing a Country Wide Survey about OOSC with OOSCI elements.** Time is ripe to change the way INSTAT collects educational data related to presence and participation of students and related to school drop-out. By developing a national survey based in schools and following it up with a national training program related to OOSC focusing on implementation of government regulations and effective data-gathering we believe that the changes will be immediate and effective.
- **Strict School Monitoring of Truancy, Drop-out and Children never attending school**

In order to reduce and to recover out-of-school preschoolers and school children it is essential to strictly monitor school participation as well as truancy, drop-out and children never attending school. In disadvantaged communities, where these phenomena are more frequent, there is declining respect for every child’s right to education. Moreover, schools and local authorities also need to be made accountable while local cooperation organizations should be consolidated to also involve school and health mediators, informal community leaders, child protection structures, and representatives of Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)’s that run relevant local projects.

From this angle, it is very important for schools to also monitor the situation of children caught in circulatory migration. At national level, it is timely to introduce a fly grade book/academic passport for those children who often accompany their parents to work in other European countries or in their home countries in order to

recognize the grades attended/finished and some courses followed during the respective school year (even marks).

- **Appropriate Human Resources Training on a Curriculum Adapted to the Needs of Children at Risk of Dropping Out**

The current appraisal system pushes teachers towards producing students that perform well at national tests. On the other hand, the education level of students from socially and economically challenged settings is way under the national average in terms of performance and any kind of progress they make is difficult to measure unless it matches national standards.

Moreover, teacher training programmes focused on working with low-opportunity students are insufficiently developed. Projects that acknowledged the importance of curricular adjustment for drop-out and truancy prevention delivered great results in this respect. Class-specific and catch-up teaching skills are insufficiently trained in initial training programmes, which means that projects like this one had to develop training guides that need to be better incorporated in the national teacher training programs.

From this perspective, it is crucial to recognize the importance of and the required skills for working with children at risk of dropping out and to enhance the prestige of teachers who work in the schools where most of these children learn. Teachers' motivation is important for them to take on new responsibilities besides those strictly related to the subject matter they teach.

- **Valorizing School-Parents Partnership and Increasing School Attractiveness:**

As we have seen, the main drop-out causes are the child's family issues. The income level at the brink of survival, the low level of education, the lack of a stable job and the very low expectations regarding their children's education are major risk factors. Hence, the families of the children at risk of dropping out need to be engaged in school activities, in an open and relevant partnership. More precisely, parents may be involved in extracurricular event planning and may benefit from counselling or professional training services. This may add a new meaning to the partnership with the family as currently schools often turn for support to a handful of parents whose children are not at risk.

From this perspective, alternative parenting programmes should be encouraged, and they should promote issues regarding parent-school/teacher communication as well as parent involvement in school decision making. In addition, with support from local authorities – in charge of covering running costs – school teams should be championed in their initiatives of making school more attractive to all student groups. Initiatives like *Schools as Community Centers* may significantly enhance the feeling of belonging and the self-esteem of students who many times don't relate to the school they attend. The experience comes to prove that engaging students at risk of drop-out into extracurricular activities and stimulating student-teacher and parent-teacher communication are highly important to the success of drop-out prevention work. In contrast, where students' academic attainment is constantly looked down on, a feeling of aversion towards school environment may arise and may be decisive for leaving school.